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ABSTRACT

This book originally written in 1978, houses a pessimistic view of American culture that the author sees no reason to modify. The central argument is that the national faith in individual initiative and free opportunity has become a breeding ground for guilt about our own limited successes and prejudice against all who exhibit signs of failure. Among the many ways society fails the disadvantaged is through the educational system. American schools graduate thousands of students who are functionally illiterate, and thousands more drop out before mastering basic skills. American schools are underfinanced and bureaucratic rigidity plays a role in their failures, but the underlying causes of educational failure are found in a view of failure as a matter of insufficient capability rather than insufficient effort. Allowing educational failure to continue allows many to distinguish themselves from those who fail, as it serves a certain usefulness in the individual-as-central mentality. The epilogue makes the point that the culture of inequality created is not likely to be changed in positive ways, but that estrangement will increase and inequalities will grow. (SLD)

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